

## **Everyday Life, Events, and Places in Second Life**

Forty Tableaux - Participant observation 2006-2008

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# VIRTUAL WORLDS RESEARCH

Sense-making strategies and user-driven innovations in virtual worlds

Working Paper No. 3, 2008 – ISBN 978-87-7349-736-4

## EVERYDAY LIFE, EVENTS AND PLACES

### IN SECOND LIFE

#### FORTY TABLEAUX

#### PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATIONS 2006-2008

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#### Abstract

In forty tableaux, this working paper presents findings from participatory observations carried out from 2006 to 2008. On the basis of the observations, cases worthwhile studying in-depth have been selected. The case studies are presented in my recent book: “Virkeligheder i Second Life – Samvær og Innovation”, 2008 (*Second Life Realities*). The findings presented stem from four distinct periods of observations: period (I), January to March 2007 – forming an overview of Danish Second Life places and projects; period (II) April to September – getting involved with the projects and places observed; period (III), October to December – predominantly, observing the same places over time; period (IV), January to March – identifying new cases on the international scene. Particularly, three cases have been observed in period I, II & III; cases that cover different areas and approaches: Library Hangouts, a case of cultural innovation; Wonderful Denmark, an innovative business case aimed at selling virtual products – land for rent and know-how about designing – to real life customers; and an innovative business case, Temp-team, aimed at building a virtual branch of a real life international business, a case followed by Power Match, an attempt to start a virtual world business setting up jobfairs. On the international scene three cases stand out with regard to future study: cultural innovation cases, sLiterary and Shakespeare Company Second Life, which are highly active and, seemingly, successful; and Metanomics, a case setting the stage for debate and reflection on the business potential, experiences and perspectives for future developments and innovations.



## INTRODUCTION.

In this working paper, observations from my case studies in the virtual world of Second Life are presented. Together, the observations and in-depth video-interviews with key figures from Second Life form the basis for the book: “Virkeligheder i Second Life”, 2008 (*Second Life Realities*). The cases documented in this book have been chosen on the basis of the observations presented in this paper; at the same time the cases have also informed the observations.

To qualify for the overall term of a case study, several criteria have been met: first, a case is followed over time, secondly, it exemplifies different types of activity, thirdly, the method of participatory observation is applicable, fourthly, the virtual life is meaningful to the key figures, and finally, the case will elucidate the five guiding foci of the study.

The guiding foci of the observations as well as of the in-depth video-interviews address five transformations in the trajectories of actor networks (Latour, 2005): 1) moving into the world of Second Life from the other life world; 2) transforming the self to become an avatar; 3) turning the avatar (avatars) into a resident and possibly becoming a member of groups, projects, islands or entertaining establishments; 4) watching the avatar and the self from a virtual distance thereby transforming the former perception of the self; and finally, 5) moving between the virtual life and work life.

The observations fall into four periods of time. They form a curve of increasing and decreasing involvement. Introductory observations are carried out in *period I* whereby a general overview is generated. It is followed by an increase in intensity with respect to the participation in *period II* and *III*, and, after that, a phaseout in *period IV* is aimed at the identification of possible new cases from the international scene.

Mainly, the observations are carried out at Danish Second Life places and islands because the research method applied to the case studies, and the methodology, treats online as well as offline activity as part of the study. Carrying out participatory observations followed by in-depth interviews and offline video-interviews on the international scene would exceed my present possibilities.

In the presentation below, forty tableaux structure the narratives about the four periods of time. Each tableau is centred on two in-world snapshots. Concurrently, they document events and observations. They are followed by a written commentary based on notes taken as I went along. The tableaux are concluded with keywords that summarize the snapshots and writings.

“Real life” (rl) is an in-world term signifying offline activity. The term is Second Life jargon and as such it is applied in this paper. However, there are problems as to the ontological implications, because, seemingly, the term constructs two different worlds whereof only the offline, is real. Such considerations are dealt with in Tom Boellstorffs’ book: *Coming of Age in Second Life*, 2008 (*chapter 1*). Still, in this paper the term is applied, but it is to be further discusses in future papers.

The voyage of discovery in Second Life begins in late 2006, when I move from the multi-user online role-playing game of EverQuest into the virtual world of Second Life to learn more about that world. Second Life is a multi-user online social world and as such it represents a different kind of world than EverQuest. The most significant difference being that user-driven agency, design and creativity is what it is all about. It is a world where the user is supposed to be actively engaged in the designing and creating of his or her world either alone or together with a group of virtual friends or commercial partners (Au 2008, Boellstorff 2008).

**PERIOD I, 2007: JANUARY TO MARCH.** From 2002 to 2004, my research on virtual worlds has been carried out in Active Worlds followed by well over a year in EverQuest (2006-2007). Thus, it is not hard to get a feel for the life in Second Life and to find out how best to utilize the many different navigational and designing tools and features. After browsing around on the mainland for a while and also visiting some of the many Second Life islands formal studies start at the end of January 2007.

In the introductory phase, the aim of the study is to survey Danish islands and place with a view to selecting some of them as the objects of in-depth case studies. Some of the early virtual islands and places are covered by Danish media – print as well as electronic and net based at the beginning of 2007. Again and again, I am contacted by journalists and students asking questions about Second Life during Spring 2007. Some of the media are part of my initial survey study in period I.



1. Chat violence. Ungdomshuset (The House of Youth).

**Tableau 1.** The *House of Youth* is one of the first Second Life places of the survey. There is a severe and ongoing real life conflict in the city of Copenhagen with encounters between the police and thousands of young people, who are evicted from the House of Youth in central Copenhagen. Also, the conflict has political implications. Thus, in order to see how the virtual site is utilized by some of the young people, my observations begin with the Second Life version of the house.

It is, however, difficult to carry out the observations as it is hard to understand the chat-language spoken. The language is as if written in some kind of code. Furthermore, it seems to have a tone of violence. One incident is illustrative of this. One of the chat sessions between groups with contrary views deepens their disputes about the ongoing conflict and crises. The disagreements escalate into a sort of verbal violence. The youth groups “shout” at each other in the chat whilst launching disruptive chats that are scripted so as to obstruct any further communication.

It seems that the Second Life platform does not provide a place for the young people to reconstruct their communities and build up something new in the virtual world. [*conflict, obstruction*]



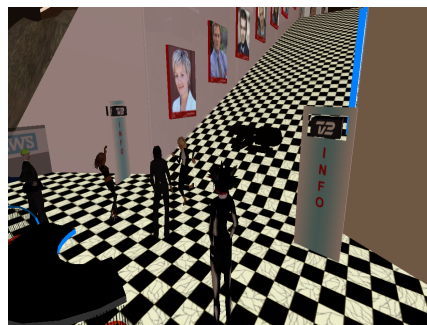
2. Meeting Circle. Chenet Shan visiting Roskilde Library Hangouts.

**Tableau 2.** Chenet Shan is my avatar in Second Life. The name, Chenet, stems from my first avatar and my virtual life in Active Worlds. As of the time of writing, entering Second Life for the first time, you have to choose a figure out of stereotypes with female shapes and design: The Night Club, Girl Next Door, City Chic, The Cybergoth, Furry, and Harajuku (*ssj: at the time of my observations*). There are similar stereotypes in male shapes and skins.

Out of the possible figures, the Cybergoth female is chosen because she to some extent is in accordance with my conception of the virtual world. The Cybergoth female is, as I see it, a cross-boundary figure crossing the borders of virtual and real life. She is like a figure of fantasy as opposed to the Girl Next Door, who is a stereotype of a realistic figure. Furthermore, she does not first and foremost convey connotations of a sexual nature. With only some minor modifications such as changing the colour of my hair and getting dressed in a blue instead of a black jacket – that is to modify and tone down the “goth and punk” connotations of the figure – I move on to observe other places than the House of Youth.

*Roskilde Library Hangouts* is a library project starting up January 2007. In the project, entrepreneurial librarians explore the virtual world whilst seeking answers to serious questions about their profession and Second Life. Libraries are public institutions with societal obligations as to general education, and the question is if Second Life has a part to play in this. Regularly, the Hangouts are visited at brief intervals. It turns out that a group of librarian avatars meet on a regular basis to discuss that very question. When invited to join one of their meetings, I gladly accept. The organizers of Hangouts have bought an animated chair with a script that rezzes a new chair each time a newcomer joins in. Automatically, the script adjusts the new chair to the meeting circle.

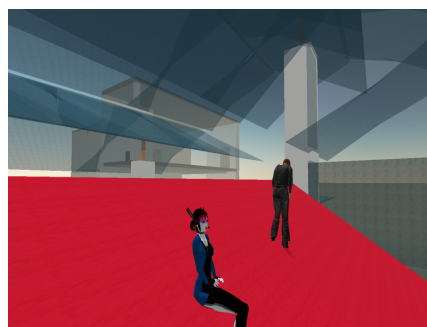
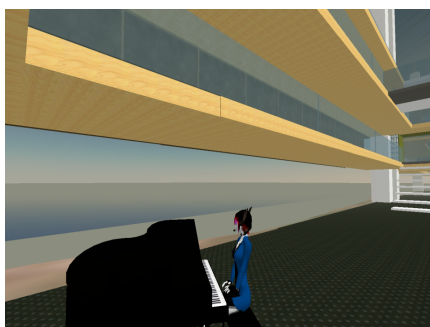
The animated feature of the chair has great effect. I feel welcome and do not get the feeling of being intrusive while attending their meeting and listening to the discussions without engaging in their chat. The discussions are about serious questions and not just small-chat as they concern the question of how best to reinterpret the library in a virtual world. However, due to the virtual world environment the atmosphere and the tone are very informal. When asked, I inform the group about my research in and about Second Life. They take immediate interest in it, so we keep up contact to exchange ideas and experience in the time to come. [*meeting circle, animated chair, serious discussions, informal, exchange of ideas*]



3. Celebrities. TV2 News.

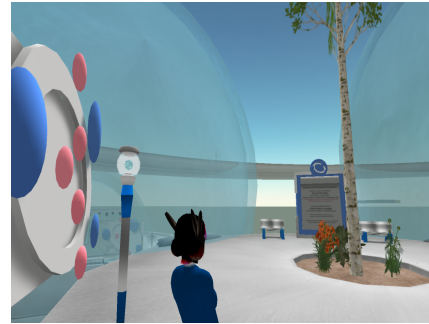
**Tableau 3.** As earlier mentioned, some of the Danish media are first movers in the Danish “immigration”. A new television station, *TV2 News*, builds a site with presentations of some of their newsreaders and host celebrities. Pictures on the wall link to external websites about the TV station and the journalists.

Over time, the place does not change and develop. Neither do I meet visitors except for the dancing session shown on the snapshot above. It turns out that the place is initiated by journalist students, who work at the station as trainees. The project is some sort of a test site on the basis of which it is to be decided whether to continue or to close the Second Life project. The students carry the responsibility for the project. It is closed when they leave TV2 News to continue their study. “We usually expect our programs to reach out to an audience of a million viewers. In Second Life there is a target group of app.rox. 17.000. It is too limited for our purposes,” says the program manager. *[students, media, celebrities, websites, test site, audience, target groups]*



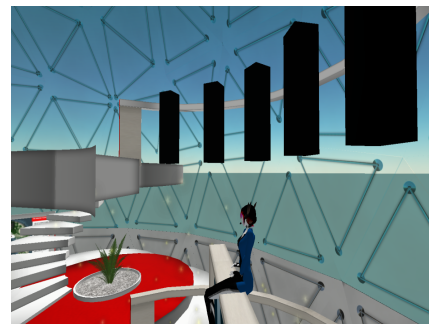
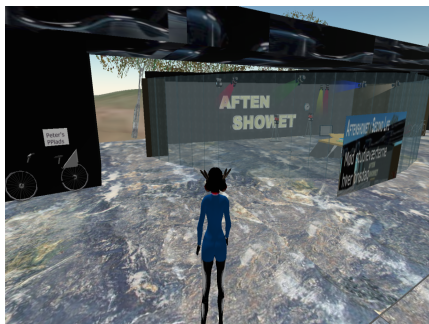
4. Main building. University of Southern DK.

**Tableau 4.** Also, the *University of Southern Denmark* is a first mover among the Danish universities. When they enter Second Life a copy of the university’s main building is built. The interior design emulates real life design with an aula, auditorium and a library. With intervals, the building is visited. However, as there is no spontaneous activity to be observed, I decide to move on. *[main building, real life emulation, reconstruction]*



5. Collective project. House of Horizon.

**Tableau 5.** *House of Horizon* is a collaborative project founded by IBM together with the consultancy firm Innovation Lab, and the computer magazine Computerworld covers the launching of the project. The project attracts a good deal of attention. A reception is held with press coverage. Following on from the opening, competitions are arranged and held. But, seemingly, the partners of the collaborative project do not carry on with many new activities. Currently, the consultancy firm Innovation Lab is one of the partners in the ongoing research project about innovation in virtual worlds (2008-2011). [*collaborative project, press coverage*]



6. Second Life studio. Aftenshowet DR1 & AvaStar.

**Tableau 6.** *Aftenshowet* is a popular DR (Danish Radio and Television) interview and entertainment program. A studio is launched in Second Life and in-world avatars are invited to ask questions and come up with suggestions and issues to be discussed. The Second Life studio does not attract much attention or in-world activity; neither does it have an impact on the real life programme. A different approach as to how to integrate old media with Second Life is taken by *AvaStar* (picture to the right). The journalists of this newspaper focus on in-world activity, and they cover issues outside Second Life, only if it has an impact on Second Life activity. [*Second Life studio, press overage, in-world press*]

**SUMMARY I.** During the first period of the voyage of discovery in Second Life, it turns out that the Roskilde Library Hangouts project is an interesting initiative for further observations. Their meeting circle with an animated chair that invites avatars to join in and to actively take part in discussions about serious matters in an informal way, seems to generate activity that is worthwhile studying more in-depth.



The other places observed do also contribute important aspects to the understanding of the dynamics and design of Second Life places. The House of Youth is an example of how difficult it is to handle conflict and also how easily obstructive behaviours may evolve. TV2 News' Second Life place exemplifies an understanding that may be characterized as a showcase of the station's real life activity. It is a test site with very little adaptation, transformation or rethinking as to the virtual environment. Furthermore, the initiative is a marginal activity in the organization as it rests on the activity of journalist student trainees. The Second Life place of the Aftenshowet program may also be characterized as an in-world showcase of real life activity although with an invitation to actively participate and hand in questions and suggestions. In order to see other examples of media that have entered Second Life, the AvaStar press is included in my initial survey. AvaStar's approach clearly generates interest and activity as the press deals with Second Life matters. Moving on from media examples to educational institutions, the University of Southern Denmark's Second Life project is an interesting place to observe as it is the first initiative among the Danish universities. At the time of observations, the project can also be characterized as a showcase. The university's main building is reconstructed in real life emulation. In the House of Horizons project the idea is to build a collaborative place. As such, it represents the vision of creating something new and not just copying existing activity and institutions. Also, the project is cross-disciplinary crossing the borders of media (Computerworld), big business (IBM) and a small and medium sized Danish consultancy firm (Innovation Lab). The project is also worthwhile studying more in-depth, which is why I ask the firm Innovation Lab to be a partner in the present research project on innovation in virtual worlds.

**PERIOD II, 2007: APRIL TO SEPTEMBER.** In the second period, the aim of the study is to participate in, and get involved with, Second Life activities.



7. Lecture. Forskningens Døgn. Roskilde Library Hangouts.

**Tableau 7.** A decisive step is taken in getting involved with the activity observed. From the general observations, an overview has been formed, and a feeling of being familiar with the Second Life world has emerged. Early contacts have been made still on the basis of a somewhat distant observational stance. Thus, the next step is to experience what it feels like to act and communicate in involved activity and in purposeful practices. I am on the look-out for the possibilities for conducting participatory observations with relevance to my research.

In April such an opportunity occurs. Every year the Danish Ministry of Innovation and Research elects a day to be dedicated to the communication of research in society. In the *Roskilde Library Hangouts* project, the initiators plan an event on that day. The event is to be mediated in real life at the town square of the city of Roskilde as well as in Second Life at the project's virtual place.

As the Hangouts know about my research, they ask if I would give a lecture in Second Life about the social life of avatars.

Accepting the invitation, I move on from somewhat non-committal participation to getting involved in a way that will allow me to experience how it is to plan and organize, and, not least, how to purposefully communicate in Second Life. Based on experience from the Active Worlds project, my suggestion is that we record the lecture in audio instead of only using the chat for it. Therefore, recordings are made in a semi-professional sound studio on the basis of a written manuscript. To plan the sessions, I meet with the Hangouts at their work place. From earlier experience, I know that it is hard to hold avatars' attention, so I suggest that we produce a set of soundtracks; a set of tracks that will allow for chat sessions in between.

The group of avatars associated with the Hangouts project is invited and so are everybody else interested in the topic. Some ten avatars attend the talk. Not many, but the participants find it okay and interesting. In organizing the talk, I experienced some of the difficulties when communicating in and with a group of more than 2-3 avatars. It is hard to hold their attention, participants walk around looking at things trying them out whilst listening and chatting. Some fly in, others away. Thus, it is very difficult to assess what happens and whether the attendees are still focussed on what goes on. This experience is very much in line with findings from earlier research (Jensen, 2007). In groups of 2-3 avatars it is possible to maintain a focus whereas in groups of up to 10 or more it seems that there is a need for a formal and strictly organised way of communicating. *[participatory observation, involvement, construction of events, communication, focus, attention, group size]*



8. Carnival. Saxo Bank.

**Tableau 8.** Surprisingly, the net-based Danish and global bank – *Saxo Bank* – has chosen a design of their island with a focus not on their main building, commercials and logo; rather, entering the place, a virtual carnival is slowly moving around the island. The design is inviting. The visitor is invited to join in with visually appealing and imaginative platforms and figures. I step on board to try out the different dances and platforms of the carnival, carrying on around their island. *[visually appealing, imaginative, inviting, dancing, moving]*



9. Research shop Forskningsbiksen. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 9.** Most importantly, a further step is taken in moving in on one of the Danish islands. *Wonderful Denmark* is the island chosen. For some time, I have been frequently visiting that very island. Wonderful Denmark is one of the Danish islands that generate traffic and activity. Avatars are always chatting and hanging out together there. The owner of the island has designed a world much in line with a commonly held cultural self-image of Danes. The initial design idea is a paraphrase of a very famous and popular Danish television production *Matador* – a series in many episodes – which is often repeated. Besides the reference to this popular TV-series, the environment is purposefully designed in a very lifelike reconstruction of a Danish provincial town. There is nothing spacy, futuristic or the like on the island. Visiting the place, it appears to be homely and with a cosy atmosphere both of which are qualities essential to Danish self-understanding. Another important design idea of the island is to create a place to be not primarily dominated by American culture.

Moving in, it is the intention to have a place from which to conduct participatory observations. Also, the idea is to invite residents and visitors of the world to take part in in-depth interviews. *Forskningsbiksen Roskilde University* (Research Shop Roskilde University) is a little shop for rent among many other shops in Wonderful Denmark. This shop is the place chosen. In the process of moving in, I experience some of the basics of not just browsing, observing and travelling but also of becoming a settled resident. Furnishing the research shop is a creative process. Although, I do not yet master the designing tools of Second Life, there is a sense of ownership with the early and very simple design. Suddenly, the Second Life places take on a different meaning than experienced up until now. Settled on the island of Wonderful Denmark, I feel at home. *[moving in, settle down, point of departure, shop for rent, research shop, design idea, sense of ownership, feeling at home]*



10. Relaxation and fun. Saxo Bank.



**Tableau 10.** Besides moving in on the island of Wonderful Denmark, I visit the Saxo Bank's Second Life place regularly. The constructors and creators of the island still emphasize unexpected aspects of the bank's activities such as leisure, relaxation and fun. They seem to be almost as important features of the island, or even more important, than those of trading. The Saxo Bank Second Life project is now one of the partners in the research project on innovation in virtual worlds (2008-2011). *[the unexpected]*



11. Public avatar meeting. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 11.** In Wonderful Denmark, it turns out that events and arrangements have an important part to play. A very well organized meeting, arranged by one of the originators of the Second Life initiative Networking.dk, takes place on the town square debating the presence – or rather the absence – of Danish universities in Second Life. The occasion is the giving of an award to the University of Southern Denmark for being the first university to move into Second Life. Well-organized, with an agenda and organisers' roles prepared in advance and a set up with well-defined rules and roles the meeting turns out to be a success.

However, halfway through the public meeting, an episode of *virtual chicane* occurs. One of the participants has prepared a virtual bomb. A countdown is initiated that cuts off the chat and with that the ongoing communication. Every 30 second a bomb explodes followed by yet another countdown. The owner of the island manages to identify and ban the intruder, but we are all somewhat shaken by the incident. *[public meeting, well-organized, success, virtual chicane, virtual bomb, shaken up]*



12. Mini-conference. American Sociology Association.

**Tableau 12.** In August 2007, the yearly conference of the *American Sociology Association* is opened with a mini-conference in Second Life. Slides, power-points and other traditional media are remediated to enable presentations and allow for questions in immediate continuation hereof. To be honest, it is a little boring. The remediated slides and ppts are hard to read in the Second Life environment, and the discussions are difficult to follow as the discussants seem to know each other well. There is a felt distance – a feeling of being left out – even if one of the organizers is very forthcoming and friendly, when she realizes that I am an “outsider” from Denmark. Still, the Second Life environment, the technological constraints, and the remediated framing obstruct my attention. It feels somewhat confusing rather than enlightening. [*mini-conference, slides, ppts, organizer, forthcoming, constraints, left out, confusing*]



13. Interview. Politiken. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 13.** In Denmark during spring 2007, there is a media hype with stories about Second Life. Stories about the fantastic “new world”, the “new frontier”, the “new identities”, the “new possibilities” pervade the media coverage. Very little of what is written is based on in-depth journalistic research. Priority is given to the sensational stories either about success or failure. However, the Danish newspaper *Politiken* sends into Second Life a reporter named Ridiculous Writer. The reporter conducts a series of interviews and observations, which he communicates in articles. Ridiculous Writer is invited to Wonderful Denmark when he asks me for an interview. Yet at that time, the hype is about to change as anti-hype gradually emerges. Second Life has not, it is said, lived up to the expectations, so it is now “given up”. Stories about projects that are stopped and firms that close down their virtual branch begin to proliferate. Based on early and very preliminary attempts to move into the world, the media and many opinion formers now conclude that Second Life is of no good. [*hype, expectations, sensations, anti-hype*]



14. Virtual chicane. Forskningsbiksen. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 14.** Suddenly one day, while still furnishing the research shop Forskningsbiksen, another incidence of what I call *virtual chicane* occurs. It is a visual take over and a scripted occupation of the shop and town. A script is launched that interrupts and disrupts every activity. Whether it is intentionally instantiated or if it is initiated by accident, no matter what, it feels very intrusive and shocking. Fortunately, after a while it stops leaving me with a sense of how defenceless you can also be in a virtual world. [*virtual chicane, visual take over, scripted occupation*]



15. Town square. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 15.** Gradually, the *town square* of the provincial town Korsbæk in Wonderful Denmark becomes one of my preferred places for observations. The town square is a well-defined framework for human intercourse and of being together. It is the ground zero of the island and there are always avatars around to chat and have fun with, be they residents of the town or accidental visitors. Also, the owner of the island, Doc Asp, makes sure that there are arrangements and events taking place. Even political comments are often designed and placed at the square. At the time of the Tibetan crisis, a political comment is designed. During the Danish election campaign posters are put up and a political meeting is held. The anti-immigration rhetoric of some Danish politicians is commented on with sarcasm. Political events are humorously mirrored in design. Yet chatting, dancing, and animating are still the most popular and frequent amusements at the town square. [*town square, framing, human intercourse, events, political comments, design, dancing, animating, chatting*]

**SUMMARY II.** During the second period of observations decisive steps are taken. Non committal observation at a felt distance is turned into involvement. On occasion this even extends to the construction of the events and activity observed – for instance in the case with the event of the Second Life lecture about the social life of avatars arranged together with the Hangouts. Experience from earlier studies of virtual worlds – Active Worlds – is applied and on the basis of that a comparison is made. Also, working together with the Hangouts team, visiting their workplace, producing the audiotracks, planning the event, all of this is off-line activities that help understand how the project group works and to understand their Second Life experiments. Members of The Roskilde Library Hangouts team are now partners in the ongoing research project about innovation in virtual worlds together with Wonderful Denmark and Saxo Bank.

In the case of renting the research shop Forskningsbiksen in the provincial town of Korsbæk on the island Wonderful Denmark another step is taken, as I get a chance to learn in depth about the everyday life of the town. Arranging and furnishing Forskningsbiksen brings about a new feeling



of ownership in the world and with that a profound change in my understanding of the social life of avatars in Second Life.

Attending arrangements in the town and living an everyday life in the research shop, I also experience events of virtual chicane. One example is a virtual bomb disruptive to a public meeting at the town square of Korsbæk. Another is the animated visual take over that interrupts all the activity in the town. In such cases there is a felt powerlessness and also anger with the intruders.

**PERIOD III, 2007: SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER.** In period III the aim of study is to carry out observations over time and predominantly at the same place.



16. Workshop. Roskilde University. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 16.** At the request of the Head of Studies, a *Communication Studies Second Life workshop* at the *University of Roskilde* is planned, and it is to be held in autumn 2007. Many hours are spent in arranging for the workshop in a Second Life design. One of the larger corner buildings in Korsbæk is rented and the design of a virtual framing for the workshop begins. The design idea is to emphasize contemplation in a Zen inspired room different from any of our lecture halls and study rooms at the real life university.

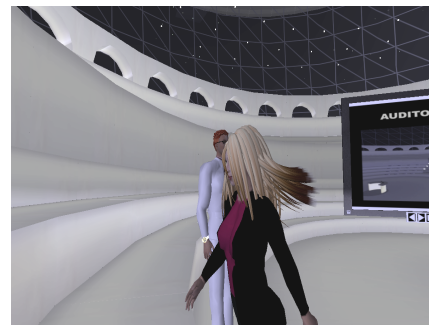
The workshop is held from mid October to mid November. Blogging, lectures and project work in groups are some of the important study methods framing the learning processes. In all, 10 students attend the workshop and they form 3 project groups. The workshop is aimed at developing the students' understanding of virtual methods such as interviewing with IM and chat together with concurrent virtual observations. I request that my students apply such methods to a virtual practice. The results of their studies are to be followed by an analysis of the communication practices under study, the aim being the creation of a Second Life design purposefully communicating issues dealt with in the analysis.

As is very often the case, I learn a lot from teaching my students, observing their behaviour, their reflective practices, and in answering many questions. [*workshop, teaching, contemplation, unusual, virtual methods*]



17. Workshop students. Communication Studies. Roskilde University.

**Tableau 17.** From the snapshots above, clearly, some of the *students* enjoy their life as residents in Second Life. Moving in on a rented parcel of the Second Life mainland a tropical paradise is created with luxurious furniture. [*students, joyful, paradise, luxury*]



18. First jobfair. Power Match.

**Tableau 18.** Another early case of study, *Temp-team*, is facing problems. Temp-team is a global recruitment firm. It is a business case and for some month an entrepreneurial employee – Heidi Ballinger is her avatar name – has built up a virtual branch of the firm in Second Life. Moving into Forskningsbiksen my choice of location is influenced by the neighbourliness to one of the Temp-team initiatives Networking.dk. The aim of this initiative is to build a network of Second Life businesses in order to share knowledge and experience. However, it turns out that the Networking.dk initiative is never really actualised. One of the principal organisers is no longer logging on to Second Life.

Also, after a while the Temp-team initiative is stopped by the top management of the firm as there is only little knowledge about the virtual world and of the ongoing virtual activities. Although supported by the day to day manager, the initiative is stopped.

This results in Heidi Ballinger, the originator of the virtual branch, resigning from her job in order to organise her new initiative *Power Match* the aim being to organise Second Life *job fairs*. When asked, I agree to give the introductory talk at the first job fair. Many avatars and firms attend the first Power Match fair including IBM, TDC (Tele Company), Grundfoss, FL Smidth, and Saxo Bank. Job seeking avatars get to meet with representatives from the participating firms. In this way, an informal meeting takes place and in cases of mutual interest, the job fair meeting can be followed up by real life contacts. Thus, the Power Match case has a problematic start as

well as a promising opening event, and it is now a partner in the research project on innovation in virtual worlds (2008-2011). *[business case, networking, problems, lack of knowledge, top management, day to day manager, informal job interview]*



19. Political meeting. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 19.** During the Danish *election campaign* autumn 2007, some of the political parties give it a try to take part in a Second Life meeting. The Danish television station *TV2 Øst* organises a political meeting in-world at Nytorv – a town square in Korsbæk well suited for such arrangements.

Many avatars attend the meeting. Politicians from the two parties *Det Radikale Venstre* (social liberal) and *Venstre* (liberal) get to experience, what it is like to run an election campaign and a meeting in the virtual environment. The day after the meeting, the liberal party *Venstre* moves in and furnishes one of the shops on the corner of the town square in Korsbæk, Wonderful Denmark. *[political meeting, electoral campaign]*



20. Small-chat. Town square. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 20.** A group of Danish avatars are *virtual friends*, and they regularly meet at the town square in Korsbæk to small-chat. Also, avatars from Europe, Asia and US visit the square. They go for a walk in the cosy provincial town and often they join the group chatting at the square, not least, because they are invited to do so by the town guides. The welcoming attitude of the town guides towards other avatars creates a friendly atmosphere.

The square frames friendly relationships, and also, it is a stage for displaying your self-presentations and design. *[virtual friendships, Europe, Asia, US, friendly, self-presentation]*





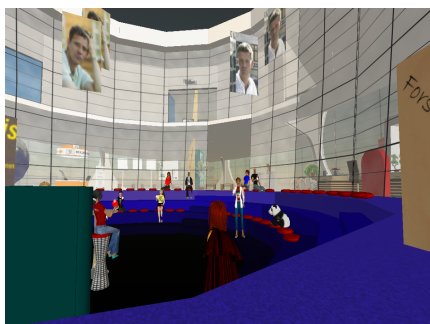
21. Romance. Sand-box. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 21.** On the island of Wonderful Denmark there is also a *sand-box*. It attracts avatars, who experiment while learning how to create and build imaginative or realistic creations and buildings. Thus, it is always a lively place and as such very well suited for observations. Clearly, the sand-box is also a place where many friendships begin and even romances arise. [*sand-box, experiments, romance*]



22. Day and night time. Town square. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 22.** Very often, imaginative *self-design* and elegant ball room gowns are displayed side by side, day and night, at the town square. [*self-design, show off*]



23. Literary meeting. Info Island DK.

**Tableau 23.** *Info Island DK* is an island and a project involving several Danish libraries. It is an experimental project with librarians discussing and imagining what a virtual library may be. Also, some of the librarians make use of the project to learn the building and scripting skills necessary to master the world in creative ways. Their experimental activities include literary meetings. [*libraries, literary meetings*]



24. Heat concert. Nytorv. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 24.** Without a doubt, music and dancing events are some of the most popular activities in Second Life. One such arrangement is a concert with the Danish group *Heat* at Nytorv in Korsbæk. The dancing events open up the possibility for avatars to show off some of their advanced dancing gestures and scripts. In the case of the Heat concert a lively and heated atmosphere evolve. [*music, concert, dancing gestures, dancing scripts, lively atmosphere*]



25. Christmas music. The old garden. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 25.** Feasts are also celebrated in Wonderful Denmark's old garden. One of the town square friends, frequently visiting the place, conducts a concert over the Christmas period. The *Christmas music* is a token of the importance of the real life feasts to some of the in-world residents of Wonderful Denmark. [*feast, Christmas music*]





26. Romance. Sand-box. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 26.** Once again, over Christmas a *romance* evolves in Wonderful Denmark's sand-box. [*sand-box, romance*]



27. Snow and Christmas. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 27.** *Snow* begins to fall in-world and avatars dress up as Santa's little helpers with Christmas hats. They are chatting side by side with avatars dressed for *summer*. [*snow, Christmas hats, summer, mixed seasons*]



28. Street performer. Sand-box. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 28.** One day, a *street performer* passes by the sand-box in Wonderful Denmark to show some of his or her funny tricks, gestures and with that the advanced scripting that the performance relies on. [*street performer, funny tricks, gestures, advanced scripting*]



29. UNA game. Workshop. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 29.** A game "Una" has been scripted. It attracts the attention of avatars just passing by and also some of the more settled residents in Wonderful Denmark. The game is played outside Roskilde University's workshop building. [*game*]



30. New Year 2008. Town square. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 30.** The *New Year 2008* is celebrated at the town square. Women in luxurious gowns celebrate together with workmen and semi-humans. A sexy girl and a furry woman show advanced and well synchronized dance performances. [*New Year, feast, luxurious gowns, craftsman, semi-human, dance performance*]

**SUMMARY III.** Being a settled resident in the town Korsbæk during period III, I observe and take part in the everyday life over time. Following the turn of seasons, allows me to also experience annual festivities (Christmas Eve and New Year). Entertaining events such as music performances and concerts, street performers juggling with animations and advanced gestures also have a part to play in the observations. It is, however, not only music events that can start avatars' dancing. Regularly, dance performances are shown at the town square of Korsbæk as dancing very often is a chance to play together with animations to show e.g. the dancers' romance

and love. But, first and foremost, virtual friendships have a predominant part to play in the avatars' social life at the town square.

The first Power Match job fair is held in the third period of observations. Engaging in the event, I get to know about the comprehensive preparations and huge effort needed to arrange such an event. It requires not only the design of the job fair framing with stalls for each of the participating companies furnished with their logos and with specific demands as for the interior design, but also the dressing up of the representatives from the companies. Often, the participating business men and women are inexperienced but at the same time eager not to reveal their inexperience. The mobilization of Second Life networks of friends and partners in business is pivotal to an event like the job fair. All of it is very time-consuming. Thus, in taking part in the event, I learn a lot about what it takes to arrange for a major event in Second Life, if it is to be successful. Evidently, it makes sense to conceptualize events and as such to arrange repeating events with affiliated networks of avatars both regularly active ones as well as occasional attendees. The Metanomics project is an example from the international scene.

**PERIOD IV, 2008: JANUARY TO MARCH.** In period IV, the observations of everyday life over time continue, but my attention is also turned towards the international scene as the aim of study is to identify potentially new case studies.



31. In-world interview. Robin Linden. Metanomics.

**Tableau 31.** In order to keep informed about other than Danish initiatives, travelling around to visit international islands and projects increasingly predominate the observations. Early on, I notice that interesting things are going on at the *Metanomics* place. Interviews are carried out with decision-makers influential with respect to the in-world conditions and activity. Members of the Linden Lab team, researchers, chief executive officers from big IT firms, artists, etc. participate in interviews that are broadcasted in-world and video-casted at the project's blog. The Metanomics project also carries out experiments with a multi-sited distribution of the interviews and the early use of voicechat. When Robin Harper, one of the influential members of the Linden Lab team, is invited to an interview then several in-world places take part in the event – among others Saxo Bank, which is also one of the sponsors of the Metanomics project.

The project stands out as it is very well organized; the avatar Beyers Sellers is a skilled interviewer, taking the conditions of Second Life into consideration. The audience bears witness of experience, and they are returning visitors. They are easily recognised by their distinctive appearances. At the moment of writing, the project is about to be included in the research project as an example of an international case that seems to benefit by the Second Life presence.



*[international project, interviews, well organised, decision-makers, CEOs, researchers, artists, impact, regular event, returning and experienced participants]*



32. Music in The Old Garden. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 32.** In *The Old Garden* of Wonderful Denmark music arrangements continue. One of the avatars enjoys entertaining the visitors. Mostly, the avatars attending the arrangement are regular visitors and members of the *WD Friends* group, but also accidental passers-by join in. On such occasions, evidently, dancing is a preferred form of human interaction, as it is a chance to show advanced gestures in loving, tender and lively behaviours. *[music, dancing, tenderness, advanced gestures and behaviours]*



33. Dancing with heart shaped balloons. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 33.** Somewhat more accidental are the *dancing* behaviours at the town square. Dancing may indicate the tenderness between dancing partners in show cases with pink and heart shaped balloons. They are symbolic cues for the romance between the two dancers. In this way, they show off their mutual feelings to the other avatars visiting the square. *[dancing, heart shaped balloons, symbolic cue, romance]*



34. Sexy male dancing. Town square. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 34.** It is not an everyday event to meet single male avatars engaged in very *sexy dance* performances. The performance is a one-off event at the town square. The performer is not one of the regular visitors. [*dancing, sexy male performance*]



35. Audience. In-world interview. Metanomics.

**Tableau 35.** It seems that the avatars attending the Metanomics events are *returning attendees*. From my initial observations the number may be put roughly at 30-35 avatars in average. [*number of attendees in average*]



36. Virtual experiments. Sand-box. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 36.** Sand-boxes are always lively places. Avatars train their basic building skills alongside some of the experienced equilibrists *juggling* with objects, buildings and animations. It seems that there is an immediate gratification in performing advanced Second Life skills in front of a seemingly inexperienced audience. [*sand-box, basic skills, equilibrists, juggling*]



37. Second job fair. PowerMatch.

**Tableau 37.** Big Danish companies and branches of international companies attend the second *job fair* of the *Power Match* project, although not as many as in the first place. In the evaluation of the event, Heidi Ballinger reports that many of the returning participants have commented on the quality of the personal meetings. They find that the second job fair offered better quality and in-depth conversations as compared to the first, possibly because the first event attracted attention due to the mere novelty of the event.

Participants in the job fair are: the big business (Danish and global) firms Grundfoss, FL. Smidth, TDC (Danish Tele Company), Saxo Bank, Hartmann, IBM, and some small and medium enterprises Termax, Job Support, IKU (Institute for Carrier Development), a public institution SKAT (Ministry of Taxation) and the Danish newspaper Børsen.

Midway, a representative of one of the Danish firms, Grundfoss, gives a talk about the company's activities in the job fair auditorium supported by presentations on a big screen.

Concluding the fair, the participants are invited for a drink in the Power Match lounge at the project's island.

Attendees are businessmen dressed up in traditional suits side by side with exotic warriors and romantic knights. [*job fair, big business, traditional outfit, exotic warriors, romantic knights*]



38. Realistic design. In-world interviews. Metanomics.



**Tableau 38.** The avatar *design* of attendees in the Metanomics events embrace semi-human designs (see figure 31) as well as realistic and advanced design both of which in a very sophisticated style. *[realistic appearances]*



39. Draconian outfits. Sand-box. Wonderful Denmark.

**Tableau 39.** In Wonderful Denmark's *sand-box* you can also meet avatars in a romantic and draconian outfit next to a tough guy appearance. *[draconian outfit, tough guy appearance]*



40. Hamlet Act 1. The Globe. Shakespeare Company SL.

**Tableau 40.** Early in the observations, the *sLiterary* project stands out and attracts attention. The *sLiterary* Magazine is part of the project's activity. The magazine opens up a chance to publish in-world literature written by Second Life residents thus mediating their experience. Closely working together with the *sLiterary* project is the *Shakespeare Company Second Life*, a group of actors, who, at the moment of writing, is performing Act 1 of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*. The Globe Theatre stages the performances, all of which with a somewhat unusual and very demanding audience. The attention of avatars is transient and it is difficult for the actors to get a feel for and to sense the audience.

The *sLiterary* project and the Shakespeare Company SL are possible cases for the future research on international projects. *[magazine, in-world literature, The Globe, Shakespeare, Hamlet, play, unusual audience, transient attention]*

**SUMMARY IV.** At the beginning of 2008, the observations once more aim at generating a general overview as to identify places of relevance to future studies. This time, it is with a view to

the international scene. Metanomics, sLiterary and the Shakespeare Company Second Life stand out as projects and places that are worthwhile studying in depth. The former has agreed to take part in our research and is to be a case study of the proceeding research. In this way, we will learn more about significant initiatives. Also, one of the organizers of Metanomics is invited to visit the research project as a guest researcher giving lectures, attending research seminars and discussing with the participating partners of the project. The sLiterary and the Shakespeare Company SL projects are experimental with respect to the theatrical performances and the sLiterary Magazine that publishes in-world narratives. The projects mentioned are very active with regular events and initiatives. Also, the affiliated groups seem to be active in the networks that organise the activities of the projects.

Besides the focus on the international scene, everyday life in the homely scene of Wonderful Denmark is still continuously observed. Music is played, avatars dance, builders and animators experiment, scripters innovate, and avatars show off their advanced self-design. So, everyday life in Second Life goes on as usual.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS.** In relation to the observations (*period I*), it turned out that the Roskilde Library Hangouts project was an interesting and innovative project. Their meeting circle with an animated chair that invites avatars to join in and to actively take part in discussions about serious matters in an informal way seemed to generate activity that was worthwhile studying in more depth. Therefore, the observations were followed by in-depth video-interviews about this case of cultural innovation.

During the second period of observations (*period II*), non committal observation was turned into involvement and even to the construction of the events and activity observed. Thus, the event of the Second Life lecture about the social life of avatars was arranged together with the Hangouts project. Working together with the Hangouts team, visiting their work place, producing the audio tracks, planning the event, it advanced my understanding of how the project group worked and perceived their Second Life experiments.

Renting the research shop Forskningsbiksen in the provincial town Korsbæk at the island of Wonderful Denmark, I had a chance to carry out an in-depth study the everyday life of the town. Arranging and furnishing the shop brought about a new feeling of ownership and with that a profound change in the understanding of the social life of avatars in Second Life. Thus, moving in on the island Wonderful Denmark and observing the everyday life was followed by in-depth video-interviews about this business case.

Being a settled resident in the town of Korsbæk (*period III*), I observed and took part in the everyday life over time. Following the turn of seasons, allowed me to also experience annual festivities (Christmas Eve and New Year). Also, the first Power Match job fair was held in the third period of observations. Engaging in the event, as I gave the introductory talk, I got to know about the comprehensive preparations it takes to arrange for such an event. The Power Match project was a follow-up on the Temp-team project and in-depth video-interviews were carried out about this business case.

Together the three cases observed in period I, II & III covered different areas and approaches:

- A case of cultural innovation (Library Hangouts) in the area of a public institution with obligations with respect to the general education in society.
- An innovative business case (Wonderful Denmark) aimed at selling virtual products – land for rent and designer know-how – to real life customers.



- An innovative business case (Temp-team, Power Match) aimed at building a virtual branch of a real life global business followed by an attempt to start a virtual world business conducting job fairs.

The three cases mentioned are dealt with in my book: *Virkeligheder i Second Life, 2008, (Second Life Realities, 2008)*.

At the beginning of 2008 (*periode IV*), again observations aimed at generating a general overview with a view to identifying places of relevance for further studies. Although this time it was with a view to the international scene. Metanomics, sLiterary and Shakespeare Company SL stand out as places to be studied in depth in the future research.

Thus, observing and in-depth video-interviewing, hopefully, the international projects will cover different areas and approaches:

- Cases of cultural innovation (sLiterary, Shakespeare Company Second Life) highly active and, seemingly, successful.
- Metanomics, a case setting the stage for debate and reflection on the business potentials, experiences and perspectives for future developments and innovations.

**REFLECTIONS.** Reflecting on the observations, the following aspects stand out and will be dealt with in coming writings and publications: the important role played by animations and with that the new branch of SL media-makers; the possibilities and problems if communicating in and with larger groups of avatars, the reinforcement of personal and informal communication, and the networking possibilities. Important also is the question of how best to set the stage for the making of sense of the virtual world activities, communicating meaningfully, and innovating if taking into consideration the need for the rethinking of the staging. There seems to be a continuum from the spontaneous encounter – be it in a cosy and homely atmosphere or in the building of friendships, the emergence of romance, in the ball-rooms, or in the posing and presentation of self – to the strictly organized meeting – be it political or public, in job fairs, talks and lectures, or in in-world media – which is worthwhile studying further.

Finally, trust, timing and techne are phenomena of the virtual world that attract my attention for my further study and publication.

**EPILOGUE: DESIGN OF AVATAR.** In tableau 2, the choice and design of my avatar is dealt with. Carrying out observations in Second Life, it proved important to carefully reflect on this design. In period *II* of my observations, an interviewee commented on the design of my avatar and with that my in-world appearance. During an interview, she suddenly mentioned that my avatar was very impersonal to such a degree that it distracted her. She could not “sense” the person behind and thus relate to the avatar. A feeling that influenced the interview as far as confidence is concerned. Her response and comment made me change the design. Below, two snapshots are presented illustrating the history of my avatar.



Two snapshots of the avatar Chenet Shan.

As mentioned (tableau 2), only minor changes to the design of my Cybergoth female had been made (*snapshot to the left*). At the time of entering the Second Life world, it did not seem important to me to spend time carefully designing my figure. Rather, the eagerness to get to know the world and its residents overshadowed the necessity to reflect on the presentation of self. No skin, hair, eyes were changed and no clothing bought. Thus, the templatelike look with no adaptation to the virtual world appeared to be impersonal and, furthermore, it conveyed a lack of engagement and interest in the world as such. It signified a distance towards the world and its residents. Actually, it was the opposite of my intentions and method of study. Therefore, a change of appearance was made. New skin and hair were bought, and, importantly, also new eyes (*snapshot to the right*). New clothes and high heeled shoes completed the change. All of it was bought and not just collected in freebie shops thus signifying a willingness to engage with, and to invest in, the world.

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